

STEPHEN E. MEATS (1944 -)



Stephen Meats was born in LeRoy, Kansas, and raised in Concordia. Foremost of his contributions to Kansas literary culture is his service as poetry editor of *Midwest Quarterly*. In that role he has curated special issues of regional poetry, including one devoted to the first Kansas poet laureate Jonathan Holden. He is able to fulfill this poet's poet role because of his own fine verse. His book *Looking for the Pale Eagle* is a rare poetry best seller—the first printing sold out quickly.

This poem "My Advice" gives directions for enjoying the countryside of Kansas. Meats describes a typical prairie road—not spectacular, but small joys unfold. He suggests that his readers stop and collect "chat," or roadbed gravel, to reposition at home. The reflective moment of collection is when sky, birds, and landscape are noticed. The rock is for remembering that moment. Like stone soup, after the recipe is complete, the stone can be discarded. As a catalyst, its purpose is fulfilled. Poems are like such stones.

My Advice

**You say you want to find yourself. You'll need
a piece of gravel. Drive any rocked road
in Kansas and you'll hear pieces by the dozen**

**knocking in your wheel wells. For once, stop
and get out of the car. Take a minute to look
at the sky—flat bottomed clouds shadowing**

**the pastures. You'll hear the meadowlark
on the fence post before you see him fly.
Pick up your piece of gravel. If you're far**

**off the main route, a handful of chat, or even
road sand will do. Cup it in your palm while your
tires hum away the miles on the asphalt highway.**

**Warm it in your pocket as you drink your coffee
at the café counter in the next town, and stay
a while to look at the faces and listen to the talk.**

**Then take it home with you and right away
put it in your garden or your flower box or drop
it in the driveway. It doesn't really matter.
You've already got your answer.**

Education: Stephen Meats attended Kansas State University for three years before transferring to the University of South Carolina, where he earned his bachelor's (1966), master's (1968), and doctoral degrees in English (1972). **Career:** Meats is University Professor and English Department Chair Pittsburg State University. Since 1985, he has been poetry editor of *The Midwest Quarterly*. Meats has published *Looking for the Pale Eagle* (Woodley Press, 1993). His poetry, articles, and fiction appear in *Kansas Quarterly*, *The Little Balkans Review*, *Albatross*, *The Quarterly*, *The Laurel Review*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Tampa Review*, *Arete*, *Hurakan*, *Flint Hills Review*, *Prairie Poetry*, *Dos Passos Review*, and others. ©2009 Denise Low AAPP 42 ©2008 "My Advice," Stephen Meats, in *Dos Passos Review*.